

THE KEEPING ROOM

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OVER BLACK:

The sound of FEET on EARTH. A WOMAN'S heavy BREATH.

Until we reveal --

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

A BLACK WOMAN, ALMA, walks towards us, hauling a BUNDLE of newly cut CANE. And then --

She spots a DOG.

The dog GROWLS at her. This gives her pause, until...

She begins to GROWL right back at it.

And then the dog starts to BARK.

So she starts to BARK too.

There's some distance between them, but here they are, barking. It's loud and strange and just this side of surreal. Until --

The dog gives in. The woman wins.

The dog sits, panting. And then --

The dog turns and trots down the road. Surprised, Alma watches him go, craning her neck until she sees...

A GRAND CARRIAGE

Pulled by TWO HORSES, stopped by the side of the road.

A frail, old CARRIAGE DRIVER sits atop.

The dog stops next to the carriage. Sits.

Alma approaches, cautious, until --

A SCREAM

From the carriage.

SUDDENLY --

A WHITE WOMAN, PRUDENCE, bursts from the carriage, running like a banshee. Her FINE CLOTHES are undone, cascading around her body.

The DOG takes off after her, BARKING.

(CONTINUED)

Alma watches her run, and then --

BANG!

Prudence falls to the ground, DEAD.

The dog stops barking. Sniffs the body.

Alma shifts her gaze back towards the carriage, where she can just make out the TIP of the BARREL of a GUN through the open door.

And lowering his still smoking pistol, a MAN emerges from the carriage in the uniform of a UNION SOLDIER.

He tucks his shirt into his unbuttoned pants.

This is HENRY. He's slick and young and has the eyes of an animal. It's unclear if he knows right from wrong, or if he even cares.

Casually, he buttons his pants.

Now the Carriage Driver sees Alma. A momentary look of FEAR passes between them. And then Henry notices Alma, she starts to back away, until --

CLICK.

She stops.

A SECOND UNION SOLDIER comes up behind her. A GUN pointed at her head.

And before she can even scream --

BANG!

He shoots her in the head. She falls down, DEAD.

This is MOSES.

He has the kind of good looks that are always getting him into -- and out of -- trouble. For a man capable of such cruelty, his eyes are surprisingly warm.

No one would call Moses a bad man, but they wouldn't call him a good one, either.

The Carriage Driver closes his eyes and looks away.

Henry smiles and takes an OLD FLASK he's found in the carriage. He takes a SIP and winces at the unexpected taste of brandy.

(CONTINUED)

And then --

He pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket, stuffs it into the neck of the flask, looks up at the Carriage Driver...

And LIGHTS it, throwing it into the carriage. Henry has his fun UNTIL --

The Carriage Driver GRABS the reigns and hits the horse, who takes off --

Moses tries to stop the carriage, stepping IN FRONT of it, but he is forced to get out of its way --

Air whips around the carriage, fanning the FIRE --

Moses raises his RIFLE --

The Carriage Driver keeps the horse running as the flames begin to ENGULF the carriage and --

BANG!

The Carriage Driver SLUMPS OVER. Dead.

But the horse and carriage continue to run.

Henry walks over to where Moses stands. They watch it as it goes.

HENRY

I coulda' used a horse.

Moses looks in the direction of dead Prudence. He makes sure Henry knows he could have had her first, for himself.

MOSES

I coulda' used a woman.

He tosses his now spent cigarette and the soldiers continue down the road, followed by their dog.

IN THE DISTANCE

The BURNING CARRIAGE is pulled crazily along by the horse.

And then, our title:

THE KEEPING ROOM

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Still. Spare. Yellow. Brown.

The SOUND of HOES hitting dirt as images come in and out:

-- Some old TREES.

-- A FARMHOUSE, small but proud and in the middle of everything, surrounded by all of its OUT BUILDINGS.

-- A PEN in a field with a single GOAT.

-- The KEEPING ROOM, a cabin-sized stand alone structure, connected to the house by a WALKWAY.

-- The BARN.

And then, people:

LOUISE and MAD.

Louise is 16 and white. Mad is 30 and black. Both work the field. Their clothes are worn and dirty.

It's quiet, save for the noises of their hoes in the earth.

Until...

A GUNSHOT.

The two women start. Everything stands stock still.

They hear a RUSTLING from the WOODS. They TURN.

Mad raises her HOE.

AND THEN --

A WOMAN emerges from the woods. SOMBER and STOIC.

A GOLDEN TEMPEST of hair mussed about her face and falling down past her shoulders, her dirty dress tied up around her legs, her boots worn and muddy.

She holds a RIFLE in her hands, but nothing else.

This is AUGUSTA.

Mad lowers her hoe, relieved.

Augusta walks towards the other women, their EYES hopeful.

(CONTINUED)

But when she walks past them the anger in her eyes tells them all they need to know: there will be no meat tonight.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - EVENING

The Keeping Room is self-contained. A little house unto itself: easy to heat, easy to cool. The small room is overwhelmed by a large FARM TABLE in the middle. Cabinets containing JARS and DRIED GOODS stand next to the door. Windows line the one to the right. A SMALL STOVE is to the left.

At the end of the table opposite the door is the FIREPLACE. Pots bubble and spew inside it. The family's history hangs above the fire in the form of tintypes, poppets, dried flowers, an OLD HAT, and several more pots and pans.

The room is lit up not only by the fire, but also by small OIL LAMPS that sit in the windows.

The three women barely use the big house now. This room is their home. If it were big enough, they'd probably sleep here.

Augusta sits at the head of the table, by the door, and Louise sits next to her, playing with a SMALL DOLL.

Mad tends to a POT on the fire.

 LOUISE
 Heard you shoot.

Mad gives Louise a look.

 LOUISE (CONT'D)
 ...what was it?

Augusta doesn't want to answer.

 AUGUSTA
 Somethin' small n' fast.

 LOUISE
 Rabbit?

 AUGUSTA
 Maybe.

Louise thinks about how good that would taste.

They all do.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Don't even know if it was really there.

She remembers it for a moment.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

But once that gun goes off everythin'
livin' is gone.

LOUISE

Why's it hard when the only thing there's
you and the rabbit?

Mad spoons TURNIPS and CARROTS into a LARGE BOWL.

MAD

The woods is big and the rabbit's small.

She walks over to the table and places it next to a plate
of GROUND HOMINY.

LOUISE

Can I start?

MAD

We all goin' to.

LOUISE

I was asking my sister.

AUGUSTA

(gently)

No need to talk to Mad like that.

LOUISE

But she's --

AUGUSTA

(firmer)

Thought you wanted to eat.

Louise is about to say something else, but she gives in
and looks down at her plate.

Mad SITS. And with that, the three women dig in.

They eat with their hands. They've given up praying.

Over this --

Mad HUMS a haunting tune that takes us to --

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

The three women EMERGE from the door, the lamps from the windows in hand.

Augusta, RIFLE in her other hand, leads the way as the women take the walkway to the BACK DOOR of the Farmhouse.

Augusta opens the door and they head in.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BACK HALL - CONTINUOUS

Lit only by the OIL LAMPS, the women cautiously make their way through the dark house.

The only room they use now is the bedroom; the rest of the house has become a stranger to them. It's nearly empty now, anyway. They've sold or traded most everything that was in it.

As they walk, Mad continues to HUM. It warms their journey towards sleep.

INT. FARMHOUSE / STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

They climb the stairs.

Augusta joins Mad, she knows the SONG well. It gets them where they need to go.

INT. FARMHOUSE / HALLWAY - NIGHT

From the far end of the hall, the women move towards us.

Still they HUM.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

They've reached their destination.

They all share this one room.

There is a LARGER BED in the middle of the room, and then a SMALLER BED has been pulled in that lies perpendicular on the wall at the foot of the other.

Mad, the last to enter, closes the door. They've fashioned a SLAT OF WOOD that goes across the door and hooks into two BRACES OF WOOD on either side.

(CONTINUED)

The carpentry is crude, but it works. It gives them a sense of peace. Of safety.

Mad puts the slat in place. And once she's done it, Louise checks to make sure the slat is secure.

Then Louise walks over to Augusta and turns her back to her. Augusta begins to unbutton Louise's dress.

Mad walks over to her bed and starts to unbutton her own dress. Her buttons are in the FRONT.

Once Louise's buttons are done, Augusta turns her back to her sister, and Louise unbuttons her.

Mad looks on at the quiet ritual between the sisters. Then she steps out of her own dress and gets into bed.

Once Louise has unbuttoned Augusta's last button, Louise gets into bed. Augusta places her RIFLE by the side of the bed she shares with Louise. She puts out her lamp and crawls in next to her sister.

LOUISE

I'm cold.

Augusta wraps her arms around her, keeping her close.

Mad blows out her lamp and looks on in the moonlight from her bed as the two sisters fall asleep.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

An empty road.

The SOUND of a HORSE, moving fast.

Then, HORSE and RIDER are seen in the distance. They approach at a steady pace.

Perhaps we get glimpses:

-- The rider's BOOTS

-- Dark leather GLOVED HANDS holding REINS

-- The uniform of the UNION ARMY

He rides fast and true; he knows where he's going.

RIDER and HORSE fill the frame as the pounding of HOOFS becomes overwhelming...

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAWN

A fat, orange SUN creeps over the house and fields.
Insects BUZZ about in shafts of early morning light.

EXT. GOAT FIELD - SAME

HATTY, the lone GOAT, chews some grass.

EXT. WOODS - SAME

Augusta searches for prey as the sun finishes rising.
She hears a NOISE. Stops. Looks...
NOTHING.

She continues on.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Louise lies asleep. The only one left in the room.
She stirs, WAKES. Looks over at the OPEN WINDOW as the
CURTAIN rolls over the breeze.

EXT. FIELD - SAME

Mad harvests some TURNIPS. The yield is unimpressive.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Augusta stops by a CREEK.
She crouches down. Splashes some water on her face. Cups
some in her hand, drinks it.
Takes in the moment of rest. And then she's off again.

EXT. ANOTHER FIELD - LATER

Louise has wandered out to the grass, still in her
nightgown, feet bare.

EXT. LARGE TREE - LATER

A HEADSTONE juts out from a moss covered mound of dirt.

Louise kneels down and drops the wildflowers in front of the cross. She sits, cross-legged, elbow on knee, face in hand, just looking at the dirt.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Augusta stands completely still, gun up. She closes her eyes, hoping she'll see where the animals are in her mind. But she can't.

No matter how hard she tries, she can't make the animals come back.

She opens her eyes and then --

A GLIMPSE of movement not too far off.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

WIDE on the farmhouse and BARN. The land is STILL.

EXT. BARN - SAME

Mad BRUSHES the old horse, FERN, who is tied to a FENCE POST. She pets her nose and then wipes sweat from her own brow.

Not too far off, Louise dreams on a MAKE-SHIFT SWING that hangs lazily from an OLD OAK.

Mad cranes her neck and calls out --

MAD

What you doin' over there?

LOUISE

Nothin.'

MAD

You should come n' help me brush this girl.

LOUISE

I'm tired --

(CONTINUED)

MAD

Funny thing considerin' you ain't done uh
stitch uh work all day.

And SUDDENLY --

BANG!

A GUNSHOT rings out in the distance.

It catches Louise off guard --

She GRABS tight to the rope. Steadies herself.

A CRY OF JOY

Rips out from beyond the trees.

Mad runs over to where she can see the trees. Louise
jumps from the swing and joins her. They look towards the
woods, breathless, searching --

AND THEN --

Augusta EXPLODES through the crest of trees, her face
bursting into a GRIN.

Mad runs to her, Louise following behind --

Augusta HOLLERS and WHOOPS --

They reach each other and Augusta holds up

A DEAD RABBIT.

Mad and Louise join in the CHORUS and together they run
straight to the Keeping Room.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - DUSK

Mad's beautiful, dark HAND as she DIGS a KNIFE into the
FLESH of the rabbit. She is deliberate: she knows how
this is done.

There is an inherent violence to the act itself, pulling
the skin off an animal.

And then:

-- The SKIN is cut away.

-- Mad wipes sweat from her face and eyes, leaving a
SMEAR of BLOOD behind.

(CONTINUED)

-- Augusta WATCHES.

-- Louise WATCHES too.

-- The SKINNED RABBIT hits the BUTCHER'S BLOCK.

-- Augusta hands Mad a CLEAVER.

-- Mad LOWERS the cleaver into the animal, and she HACKS the rabbit to pieces.

-- Mad drops the PIECES onto a SKILLET.

The women wait. The rabbit boils.

They are hungry.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

A PEWTER TRAY

With pieces of BOILED RABBIT smack in the middle.

The women take a moment and stare at the beauty of the creature. It's proud body in pieces, warm and brown.

Augusta leans in and SMELLS it.

Then Mad.

Then Louise.

This smell will line their hearts for months.

Louise goes to grab a piece, but Augusta stops her. Louise looks up at her and --

Augusta's eyes are CLOSED.

Louise and Mad exchange a look. Then Mad closes her eyes. And then Louise does, too.

After a moment --

AUGUSTA

Alright.

A smile creeps over Louise's face. She looks at her sister, real proud.

A shy smile comes over Mad. She looks at Augusta out of the corner of her eye, and Augusta smiles back.

(CONTINUED)

And then --

THEY EAT.

They devour the rabbit like ANIMALS, tearing at it's muscles, it's meat, using their hands and mouths, but they experience the emotions of the moment like WOMEN, pulling in the textures and flavors and smells to their hearts and minds. Inexplicably ravaging and savoring at the same time.

And they can sense each other doing and feeling everything together.

It's almost holy.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - LATER

Mad holds an OLD BANJO and SINGS. Louise and Augusta sing along. Augusta BANGS on the table to the rhythm.

Louise DANCES.

Augusta gets up and joins her sister. Arms linked, they move about the room as one.

The song ends and Louise claps.

Augusta falls into her chair.

And then Mad starts to play another SONG, but this one is different. It is very quiet, and very sad.

LOUISE

But we don't know this --

AUGUSTA

(gently)

Shhhh --

LOUISE

I want her to play --

AUGUSTA

(still gentle)

Mad's singin' what she wants to.

Louise slowly concedes, sitting and listening, arms crossed.

It's a work song. It's about loss and suffering. But also it's love song. A song about hope. And Mad knows it well.

(CONTINUED)

The song ends. It's followed by a long silence that somehow feels like it's part of the song.

And over this --

The sound of RAIN lightly tapping on the windows of the Keeping Room. The WIND gently rattling the old glass.

The rain gets louder and louder, UNTIL --

CUT TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - NIGHT

Louise WAKES in a sweat. She GASPS. Wakes Augusta.

They WHISPER, so as not to wake Mad.

AUGUSTA
What is it?

LOUISE
I saw 'em.

AUGUSTA
Saw who?

Augusta touches her face, trying to calm her.

LOUISE
Daddy and Nathaniel.

Beat.

AUGUSTA
Was only a dream --

LOUISE
But I was there --

AUGUSTA
(gently)
Go back to sleep.

Augusta lies back down. Louise does too.

There's a moment of silence.

LOUISE
Can't stop hopin' they might come back --

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA

Our father and brother ain't desertin' no duty.

LOUISE

It was like it was really happenin', they needed me --

AUGUSTA

What happens when you sleep ain't real.

Louise gives in. Augusta closes her eyes and puts her arm around her sister.

Rain TAPS the windows. Wind RATTLES the glass.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

WATER from the night's rain hangs on the GREEN LEAVES of trees. The sun casts SHADOWS of their trunks and branches on the side of the house.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Augusta wakes to see Louise is no longer in bed.

In her own bed, Mad sleeps.

INT. FARMHOUSE / HALLWAY - SAME

Augusta slips along the upstairs hallways of the house. The old wood PALE and PURPLE in the morning light.

A door is slightly ajar at the end of the hall. Augusta moves towards it.

THROUGH THE CRACK IN THE DOOR

We see the BACK of a WOMAN inside the room looking at herself in a mirror. The woman wears a fine LAVENDER DRESS. Her hair is so long and so dark. We can't see her face.

Augusta pushes forward, the door CREAKS --

The woman TURNS --

And as she turns she becomes...

LOUISE.

(CONTINUED)

Augusta shakes her head back into the moment.

AUGUSTA
Thought you was a ghost.

LOUISE
I look like her.

It's not easy for Augusta.

AUGUSTA
You do.

She tries to push through it --

LOUISE
Almost fits me now.

But she can't.

AUGUSTA
You should take it off --

LOUISE
But I just put it on --

AUGUSTA
I best not see that dress movin' again.

Augusta leaves. Louise turns and looks at herself over her shoulder, to see the back.

EXT. FIELDS - LATER

Mad and Augusta work the land.

Louise approaches, carrying a bucket of water, still wearing their MOTHER'S DRESS.

Louise puts down the bucket.

Mad looks at Louise and then at Augusta.

AUGUSTA
Thought I told you to take that off.

Mad hands Louise a hoe.

LOUISE
Didn't feel like it.

Louise goes to work.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA

Louise, I'm asking you, please.

Mad reaches into the bucket, drinks a ladle-full of water and then dips it back in and hands the ladle to Augusta.

LOUISE

Why you care so much?

Augusta drinks, throws the ladle back into the bucket.

AUGUSTA

You gonna ruin it.

Mad and Augusta go back to work.

After a moment, Louise deliberately drops her hoe.

LOUISE

Don't feel like hoein'.

Mad gives Louise a LOOK. Louise meets her gaze.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Don't like her lookin' at me that way.

AUGUSTA

Get back to work.

LOUISE

She's the nigger, she should do it.

Mad just shakes her head and keeps on working.

AUGUSTA

Like I told you, Louise: we all niggers now.

Augusta resumes her work with Mad.

Louise hesitates, then makes a decision and walks away.

Mad looks up at Augusta. Augusta doesn't return the gaze.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

The three women sit in SILENCE around the table.

Louise still wears the dress. She pushes TURNIPS around the edges of her plate.

Mad and Augusta have just about finished their dinner.

(CONTINUED)

Augusta looks at her sister, and then at Mad. Mad and Augusta share a look, and Augusta makes eyes at her.

Mad doesn't know what the eyes mean.

Augusta gets up, goes over to the cupboard and pulls out a LONG, THIN SCRAP of fabric.

Now Mad knows...

Augusta comes up behind Louise and wraps the fabric around her eyes, BLINDFOLDING her.

LOUISE

No! I don't want to --

Louise goes to pull it off but before she can, Augusta slips an ONION into her hands. She just holds it there for a moment until...

She moves the onion from one hand to the other, and then smells it.

Mad and Augusta look on intently.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

It's an onion.

Augusta and Mad CLAP and HOLLER. Louise pulls off the blindfold and puts down the onion.

Augusta grabs the blindfold and ties it around Mad's face. She looks around the room for something. She gestures quietly for Louise to join her. Louise can't help but SMILE.

They dart around the room, rejecting each other's choices in silence so as not to give themselves away.

And then Augusta has an IDEA and she pulls off her BLOOMERS. Louise STIFLES a GIANT LAUGH and hands the bloomers to Mad. Mad inspects them, moves them through her hands.

Suddenly realizing what they are, she drops them.

MAD

(removing the blindfold)

Good lord I know you know better.

Mad shakes her head.

Louise and Augusta LAUGH. Mad concedes, LAUGHING too.

(CONTINUED)

Augusta puts her bloomers back on.

LOUISE

It's your turn Augusta.

Louise grabs the blindfold and wraps it around Augusta's face. Mad and Louise move around the room and before Mad can say anything, Louise pulls the MAN'S HAT down from above the fire and hands it to Augusta.

Augusta holds it in her hands. She feels it, slowly. She suddenly stops smiling and gets real QUIET.

She takes off the blindfold and puts the hat back above the fire.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

What? What's wrong?

AUGUSTA

I'm done playin'.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Even in the darkness the sky and land are so very big.

Our Rider sits on the ground next to a small fire, his HORSE nearby.

It's quiet. He warms his hands.

And then we see his face. It's warm and tired and dark.

BLACK RIDER

Cold tonight.

He waits.

BLACK RIDER (CONT'D)

You don't talk much, do ya?

He looks at his HORSE. Waits for a response.

BLACK RIDER (CONT'D)

Shit.

He pulls a BATTERED FLASK out from his coat. He takes a sip and WINCES. And then another. He clears his throat.

(CONTINUED)

BLACK RIDER (CONT'D)

I miss the sound of a woman's voice.
'Specially the tough ones, cause they
still smooth in they way. The sound of it
when they wake up wantin' some.

He remembers. He takes another swig.

BLACK RIDER (CONT'D)

Want a drop?

Suddenly Bill's face CHANGES --

He senses something we cannot.

And then, the sound of HORSES GALLOPING.

Quickly, he stamps out the fire and pulls his horse to
the ground. The horse bristles and bays under the
surprise of the motion, but as the Black Rider lays down
on the horse's neck, it finally submits, lying quietly on
the ground under his master.

SILHOUETTES of MEN ON HORSES pass like thunder.

The Black Rider's face and the face of his horse are so
very close together, lying there on the cold ground,
disappeared in the darkness.

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

CRACK!

An AXE and LOG descend into frame.

The axe is held by Augusta.

A piece of wood SPLINTERS in two.

Augusta resets with a new piece of wood and her axe. This
is ritualistic for her. She knocks the axe gently into
the piece of wood, the axe catching in it. Then she
raises her arms, wood and axe as one, and...

CRACK!

Augusta takes another log. Notches the Axe. Reels back.

And...

CRACK!

But there's a SOUND behind the sound.

(CONTINUED)

SHE STOPS. Listens. *Did she hear it?*

Nothing.

She resets --

Raises the axe and log over her head, and --

A SCREAM

Not too far off.

She drops the axe and wood, grabs her RIFLE, and runs.

EXT. WOODS - SAME

Mad is running just up ahead of her. Augusta runs past.

They come upon Louise, on the ground, WAILING. A fresh RED WOUND shines on her leg.

AUGUSTA

What happened?

She looks around, trying to discover the danger.

Louise won't focus. Augusta bends down.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

(grabbing her)

Louise! What happened?

LOUISE

(just barely)

...raccoon.

Augusta looks around once more, but there's nothing.

She looks at Mad.

AUGUSTA

(to Mad)

She was supposed to be workin' with you --

MAD

Can't keep my eyes on her all the time.
There' work to do and she's gotta learn
what's right --

Augusta stands and SLAPS Mad.

Mad shows no sign of pain.

(CONTINUED)

THEN --

Mad SLAPS Augusta.

Augusta holds her face. A long moment. She's about to say something, to apologize, but then --

AUGUSTA
We best get her inside.

The women struggle to lift Louise.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - MORNING

Louise SWEATS and MOANS in the bed. Her eyes are half open, searching. Augusta sits by her side, mopping her brow. Mad stands at the foot of the bed.

Augusta lifts up the sheet to look at the bite.

It's worse now. Swollen and angry.

AUGUSTA
We need some medicin'.

MAD
Maybe they got somethin' at the Weaver place.

Louise MOANS. Mad comes around and sits on the other side of her. She takes the cloth from Augusta and gently wipes Louise's face.

MAD (CONT'D)
(to Augusta)
You should go.

Over this --

The sound of HORSE HOOVES pounding earth, gradually getting louder, taking us to --

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

Fern goes as fast as her old body can.

Augusta rides, following the old dirt road past countless trees and hills -- so many shades of green and brown -- that roll out BIG and QUIET around her.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

The SUN is beginning to move past the center of the sky, casting shadows, playing tricks on the world around her.

She'd almost forgotten how big some hills, how big some trees can be. She'd almost forgotten about the world outside her world, about the shadows and the secrets that lie beyond the boundaries of her land.

How even during the day, the BLUE and PURPLE MIST can fill the sky and cover the mountains with such longing and mystery.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

As Augusta makes her way down the road, she approaches a SMALL, ONE-STORY HOUSE set back against a clump of tall trees.

This is the WEAVER HOUSE.

EXT. WEAVER HOUSE - SAME

Augusta dismounts Fern and drops the reigns; the old horse isn't going anywhere.

She approaches the HOUSE.

EXT. WEAVER HOUSE - SAME

Augusta moves to the door and knocks. It creaks open under the weight of her fist.

AUGUSTA

Hello?

Beat.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Mary?

Beat.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Clara?

Augusta goes inside.

INT. WEAVER HOUSE / FRONT HALL - SAME

Augusta moves through the front hall of the house.

It doesn't look lived in. Just the opposite: this place has been abandoned. No noise. Just dark and quiet.

AUGUSTA

Mary? Clara?

She goes into one of the bedrooms.

INT. WEAVER HOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

She rummages through the cabinets, looking for something, anything to help Louise. Problem is, she doesn't know what she's looking for.

All she finds are a tintype of a baby, some sewing tools and some unidentifiable dried HERB.

She smells the herb and sticks it in the belt of her skirt, just in case.

She looks up and she catches a glimpse of something in a mirror --

It's just her own reflection. She steadies herself.

The SOUND OF FLIES slowly fades up...

INT. WEAVER HOUSE / FRONT HALL - SAME

Augusta goes back through the hallway. Now she notices the FLIES on the WALLS and flying in the air around her.

INT. WEAVER HOUSE / ANOTHER BEDROOM - SAME

Augusta pushes open the door.

In front of her is a WOMAN sitting motionless in a CHAIR. She leans to one side, her arm hanging down.

FLIES are EVERYWHERE.

Augusta goes to her.

AUGUSTA

...Mary?

MARY is motionless. Her eyes WIDE OPEN.

(CONTINUED)

The WOMAN is DEAD.

The DIN from the FLIES is UNBEARABLE.

Augusta SWATS them away, kneels in front of her.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Mary.

Augusta follows her lifeless arm down to the floor where a bottle lies, broken. Some kind of POISON.

Augusta picks up the bottle and places it on the table next to the bed. She sits Mary straight up, not sure what else to do.

AND THEN --

Closes her eyelids. Puts Mary's hands in her lap.

She steps back and looks at her work.

EXT. WEAVER HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Augusta walks quickly out of the house and away from it.

Once outside, she stops and stands for a moment, trying to catch her breath.

Is the whole world this way now?

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Augusta rides. The wilderness begins to subside.

Fern is tired. Augusta, too.

EXT. CALEB'S - LATE AFTERNOON

For all the farms and houses in the outlying areas, Caleb's serves as the closest thing to a town. The needs of most are met with Caleb's whores and Caleb's liquor.

While it's a stand alone building, there are usually people and horses filling the road in front.

But now it's virtually deserted. Augusta had no idea.

She approaches the building and sees a dog, THE DOG, sitting out front.

(CONTINUED)

She dismounts and drops Fern's reigns as before.

Augusta stands still and regards the dog. It's a comfort after what she's just seen.

Augusta moves to pet him. She gets closer...

GRRRRRRRRRRRR.

The dog GROWLS.

And as she gets closer he just gets louder so she backs up -- CAUTIOUS -- and makes her way inside.

INT. CALEB'S - SAME

At the far end of the room is the BAR. And on the left side of the room is a STAIRCASE leading up to a small LANDING.

TWO OLD MEN too old and crippled to fight look up from their game of CARDS as Augusta moves towards the bar. ONE COUGHS the wheezing cough of someone close to death.

She makes it to the BAR.

CALEB, the old bartender, turns. He's too old to fight but not too old to know what's what. His face is grizzled and bearded and kind.

CALEB

...Augusta?

AUGUSTA

Caleb.

CALEB

You shouldn't be here.

AUGUSTA

I know.

Beat.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Anyone come back since last time?

CALEB

A few injureds. A few deserters. Can't say who.

AUGUSTA

But no sign of my --

(CONTINUED)

CALEB

No.

Augusta tries to hide how foolish she feels for thinking maybe there would be good news.

AUGUSTA

You hear from anyone out at the Weaver place? Seen Clara?

CALEB

Mary was the last one I saw. Few months back. She was lookin' for Clara. She run off. Musta gone West, I said.

AUGUSTA

I just been there.

CALEB

And?

AUGUSTA

Mary's dead.

CALEB

No...

AUGUSTA

Drank herself some poison.

CALEB

You come here just to tell me that?

AUGUSTA

No. Louise. Raccoon bit 'er.

CALEB

You been ridin' all day?

AUGUSTA

Almost --

CALEB

On Fern?

AUGUSTA

Yessir.

CALEB

That old horse dead yet?

AUGUSTA

Just about.

Caleb motions with his eyes to the room behind her.

(CONTINUED)

CALEB
You should go.

Augusta turns to see --

TWO SOLDIERS at a table by the fire. Wearing uniforms of the UNION ARMY.

We know them as MOSES and HENRY.

They drink from a JUG of MOONSHINE. Moses smokes one of his hand rolled CIGARETTES.

As Augusta turns back, there beside her is

A WHORE.

Her bright colors have faded, rouge misplaced on a forgotten face.

It's hard to tell if she's young or old, but if there wasn't a war on, you can be sure she'd be beautiful.

This is MOLL.

MOLL
Here.

She extends a SMALL GLASS OF MOONSHINE to Augusta.

AUGUSTA
What's this for?

MOLL
You'll know soon enough.

Augusta swallows it whole. Sputters.

MOLL (CONT'D)
Good girl.

Beat.

AUGUSTA
Went to the Weaver's hopin' for some
medcin'. Found this --

Augusta pulls the dried HERB from her belt. Moll takes it. Smells it.

MOLL
Dried sage won't help nothin' but stew.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA

Came here hopin' for better luck.

CALEB

Ain't been medcin' here in a long time.
You should go 'fore they sober up --

AUGUSTA

I can't go back with nothin'.

MOLL

Wait here.

Moll goes.

Caleb and Augusta watch her.

The soldiers do too.

It's quiet and tense and then --

Moll returns. She has a SMALL LEATHER POUCH in her hand,
which she puts on the bar.

MOLL (CONT'D)

You put her in the tub. You boil water
beyond boilin'. Don't worry bout burnin'
her. Got that?

AUGUSTA

Yes ma'am.

MOLL

And close her up in that hot room. No
matter how much she fights, you keep her
there. It's once she stops fightin' you
take her out.

AUGUSTA

Alright.

MOLL

You got vinegar?

Augusta nods.

MOLL (CONT'D)

After the heat, you put vinegar on that
wound as much as she'll let you. And then
take some of this --

Moll nods to the POUCH --

(CONTINUED)

MOLL (CONT'D)
Slather it on the wound n' leave it.

AUGUSTA
Thought you said there wasn't no --

CALEB
I wouldn't call that medcin'.

AUGUSTA
But it'll work?

Moll considers.

MOLL
You ready for her to die?

Augusta shakes her head. *No.*

Moll pours them each a SHOT.

MOLL (CONT'D)
It might work. But you get ready.

They down the shots.

Augusta winces.

AUGUSTA
Alright.

Moll leans in. Whispers.

MOLL
Where you ridin' to?

AUGUSTA
Due east. Night's ride.

MOLL
What you ridin'?

AUGUSTA
A dead horse.

Moll looks at Augusta real good and then moves away, just barely motioning for Caleb to follow her. He does.

Augusta watches as they walk to the side of the bar. She fiddles with her empty glass.

She can't help herself. She turns to the SOLDIERS...

And they are staring RIGHT AT HER. Henry SMILES.

(CONTINUED)

Augusta starts to look away, past Henry's face, but something about Moses' eyes stops her turning.

It's an instant, so small, but their eyes lock and then -- quickly -- she turns away.

Moll and Caleb return. Caleb does not look happy.

Moll leans in and WHISPERS --

MOLL
You're gettin' Captain. He's a good horse.

AUGUSTA
Why you bein' so nice to me?

MOLL
I knew your Daddy. He was a good man.

AUGUSTA
He was alright.

A look passes between them and then --

Moll pours them one LAST SHOT.

CALEB
Hey, how much uh that you gonna --

MOLL
We're only savin' it for someone who needs it.

They shoot the drinks.

HENRY (O.C.)
(drunk)
I see you found more liquor.

And suddenly he's right behind them.

CALEB
(scared, now)
Sure thing. Here you go.

He hands him the JUG.

HENRY
(not taking his eyes off Augusta)
What'd ya know, Moses. This place is luckier than we thought.

(CONTINUED)

It's tense.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 (to Augusta)
 Didn't think they came this pretty
 anymore. You comin' over?

Augusta keeps her eyes DOWN and does not respond.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 ...maybe later.

He walks back to his table.

CALEB
 (clearly lying)
 Got even more in the back for you, just
 wait there...

Caleb goes.

Moll waits a moment and then, quiet as can be:

MOLL
 Go upstairs through the room and out the
 window. Caleb'll be waitin'.

AUGUSTA
 (barely audible)
 Thank you.

Augusta and Moll share a look and then, just like that:

Moll turns, all SMILES and ARMS as she heads towards the
 table with the Soldiers.

MOLL
 You boys hungry for me?

She playfully sits on Henry's lap.

Augusta stands, doing her best to be INVISIBLE.

But Moses follows her with his EYES, a dog following
 meat. Henry, meanwhile, is consumed with Moll.

Augusta walks past them as calmly as she can.

Sensing Moses, Moll puts her hand on his PANTS...

MOLL (CONT'D)
 I bet you want some too...

Moses REMOVES her hand, eyes on Augusta.

(CONTINUED)

ON THE STAIRS

Augusta slowly moves to the top. LAUGHTER behind her.

She reaches the top and heads down the LANDING towards a DOOR. She pushes it OPEN --

She looks back to see Moses watching her. With a GLANCE, she does her best to pretend like she knew he was watching --

And then she DISAPPEARS into the ROOM.

BACK AT THE TABLE

Moses watches Augusta enter the room, and --

He STANDS. Moves to the

STAIRS

And quickly ascends, as if invited by her eyes.

MOLL (CONT'D)
(too loudly)
Where you goin' honey?

Moses is now on the LANDING and walking towards the DOOR -
-

MOLL (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Ain't nothin' up there but --

HENRY (O.C.)
(severe)
Better things to do with your mouth than talk.

Moses OPENS the door...

INT. CALEB'S / UPSTAIRS ROOM - SAME

OLD WALLPAPER peels, its flowers rotting on the walls.

A small double BED sits on the far side of the room.

But she's NOT THERE.

And then he sees it --

AN OPEN WINDOW.

Moses moves quickly to the WINDOW and --

INT. CALEB'S - SAME

Henry is roughly moving his mouth all over Moll --

And outside the dog starts BARKING.

Henry hears it and stops. But Moll grabs his face, forcing her lips onto his --

Henry pulls away, but Moll grabs him back. And he tries to PULL AWAY again but when he does she BITES DOWN.

He rips his BLOODIED LIP from her. There's BLOOD all over HER MOUTH, too --

The dog BARKS louder --

He reels back and SMACKS her. She FALLS.

He hustles out the front door --

EXT. CALEB'S - LATE AFTERNOON

The dog stands BARKING at the feet of a FINE HORSE.

Moses -- having just jumped down from the window -- stands up, sees something, and slowly puts his HANDS in the air.

And then from BEHIND HIM we see --

Augusta sitting atop the fine horse -- CAPTAIN -- her RIFLE pointed right at Moses.

The dog between them BARKS and BARKS.

Caleb stands, BREATHLESS, between the girl on the horse and the soldier.

Henry comes running and stops when he sees what's happening. He reaches for his gun, but before he can grab it Augusta turns her rifle towards him. Captain readjusts his feet.

Henry freezes.

And then everyone is stock still and silent save for the dog, who continues to BARK --

MOSES

Quiet now, boy.

He keeps going.

(CONTINUED)

MOSES (CONT'D)
 (harsh)
 I said quiet! Come here.

He whistles. The dog obeys.

And now Moll comes running out.

MOSES (CONT'D)
 (to Augusta)
 Don't think he likes what you're up to.

The alcohol is hitting Augusta, making her bold and a little less afraid.

AUGUSTA
 From what I seen that dog don't like much
 'uh anything.

MOSES
 Battle.

AUGUSTA
 What?

MOSES
 His name. Battle.

Beat.

AUGUSTA
 Sure sounds like one.

Moses smiles.

MOSES
 That's a mighty fine horse for a girl.

CALEB
 (to Augusta)
 You go on now.

MOSES
 She got somewhere to be?

AUGUSTA
 I do.

MOSES
 All on your own?

Moses moves a little closer to her.

(CONTINUED)

MOLL
No, she's got people.

Augusta looks at Moll and then back at Moses.

AUGUSTA
Lots of 'em.

Augusta surveys from her mount:

-- Caleb looks up at her, fear in his eyes.

-- Poor old Fern, tied up, barely standing.

-- The soldiers.

-- Moll, lips still covered in Henry's blood.

MOLL
GO.

SUDDENLY --

Augusta slings the rifle around her back, turns the horse, and RACES AWAY.

EXT. CALEB'S - SAME

Augusta rides Captain away from the others.

EXT. CALEB'S - SAME

Moses and Henry turn towards Moll and Caleb who stand by, uneasily awaiting their fate.

EXT. ROAD NEAR CALEB'S - SAME

Augusta rides on.

In the distance, a GUNSHOT.

And then ANOTHER.

Augusta keeps going.

ANOTHER.

She kicks Captain to RUN FASTER, leaving the others behind.

It's just the NIGHT and the GIRL and the HORSE.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Augusta and Captain ride on through the darkest night.

The road is lined with PRICKLY BUSHES that grab at her. Something catches on them, holding Augusta for a moment -- frightening her -- but Captain is strong and he pulls away.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Augusta is exhausted...

But Captain's just getting started.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

The sound of HOOVES get closer and closer.

Mad cautiously moves closer to the road.

And then she sees...

IT IS AUGUSTA

Slumped over Captain's back.

Mad runs to her.

Augusta literally falls off the horse and into Mad's arms. She looks at Mad's beautiful, familiar face.

An exhausted smile consumes her and she throws her arms around Mad. Mad holds her up, taken aback by this show of affection.

Mad takes Augusta's arm and slings it across her shoulders, slipping her arm around Augusta's waist to help her walk.

They move like this towards the house, Augusta holding Captain's lead, Mad holding Augusta.

MAD

Where you get that horse?

AUGUSTA

Whore gave it to me.

MAD

I knew your Daddy wasn't just playin' cards.

(CONTINUED)

And with that Augusta stops and...

VOMITS at Mad's feet.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Mad and Augusta take a GIANT POT OF WATER off the fire. They struggle as they carry it out of the Keeping Room and head to --

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The water SLOSHES between them as they move across the walkway and into --

INT. FARMHOUSE / STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

They head up the stairs to the --

INT. FARMHOUSE / HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mad kicks a door open. STEAM pours out and we see --

Louise sitting in an old wooden TUB, knees tucked up to her chest, arms wrapped around her knees.

Shivering. Shaking.

Mad and Augusta DROP the pot.

Augusta SLAMS the door closed.

Augusta comes over and begins to LADLE the hot water onto Louise's back.

Small GASPS and MOANS come from Louise, as if without her knowledge or permission.

Augusta ladles more onto Louise and into the tub.

Louise won't stop SHAKING.

Mad crouches down at the base of the tub. She puts her hands on it, holding tight. Augusta drops the ladle and crouches too.

Louise's skin is HOT and RED. Augusta reaches her hand out to her, smooths her hair.

And the three women sit there.

(CONTINUED)

All they can do is wait.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - LATER

Louise lies in bed, red-faced and breathing deeply.

Mad has fallen asleep next to her, exhausted.

Augusta looks on at the two sleeping women from the foot of the bed. She leans in and lifts the skirt of Louise's nightgown. The WOUND shines PURPLE and BLACK. She takes a cloth, dabs it with VINEGAR and applies it to the wound.

Louise WAKES and CRIES OUT, cringing at the pain.

Augusta puts her hand out to Louise, who grabs it TIGHT.

Augusta does her best to hide how relieved and surprised she is that Louise is awake.

Then she takes the MUSLIN POUCH from her pocket. She smells it: it's AWFUL. She turns her nose away.

She dips her hand in and --

Louise stops Augusta's hand with her other hand. With her eyes, Augusta tells her that this one won't hurt.

Louise lets go of the hand with the poultice.

Augusta SLATHERS the GREEN POULTICE over Louise's wound.

Louise strains to lift herself to look.

AUGUSTA

Don't --

LOUISE

I wanna see it.

Augusta holds her up so she can see.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Looks disgustin'.

AUGUSTA

Smells even worse.

She helps Louise back down to the pillow.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

You should try 'n sleep.

(CONTINUED)

LOUISE

Don't want to.

Augusta can feel her sister's fear. Even more reason to hide her own.

AUGUSTA

I can just keep talkin' til you do...

Louise nods.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

I remember daddy tellin' a story bout a girl 'n her sister?

Augusta picks up some MUSLIN SCRAPS she's made to bandage Louise's leg. And as she tells the story, she carefully wraps and bandages the wound.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

And the girl was gonna be killed by the king.

LOUISE

What king?

AUGUSTA

I don't know, some king somewhere.

LOUISE

Why was he gonna kill her?

AUGUSTA

Guess she musta done somethin' he didn't like. The whole town turns up for the execution, includin' the girl's sister. And the sister goes to the girl, who's crying now, and says, when the king asks you for any last words, say you want me to tell you a story.

Louise listens intently, now.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

So when the king asks, the girl says -- I want my sister to tell me a story. The king grants the request and the sister starts tellin' a story so good that the king can't help but listen. And dawn has come and gone and now it's twilight. And the whole town is still standin' there with their hearts in their throats. And suddenly, at just the most excitin' part, she stops --

(CONTINUED)

LOUISE

Why?

AUGUSTA

She says to the king -- you want to know the rest, I will tell you tomorrow if you give my sister one more day. Now the townspeople think he'll kill 'em both, but the King, needin' to know the end, says yes.

LOUISE

What was the story she was tellin'?

AUGUSTA

I only remember the part 'bout her tellin' it.

LOUISE

So did the king kill the girl after?

AUGUSTA

The next day, just as soon as the sister finished that story she started another and she stopped that one just 'fore the best part and the same thing happened the next night and the next night for near a thousand nights.

Louise's eyes are starting to close...

LOUISE

What happened to the girl?

AUGUSTA

As long as her sister kept tellin' stories, she didn't have to die.

They drift OPEN one last time...

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

And after she told all those stories, I think the king married her.

She's asleep.

Augusta watches her.

And then, after a moment, come the heavy breaths, the breaths that try to keep in the tears. The tears she's been holding back since the moment she thought her sister might die. Since the bite. Since the body. Since the town. Since the men.

(CONTINUED)

And then --

Big, hard tears. Short, deep breaths. She makes it as quiet as she can, but she can't keep it in. Not anymore.

And after one last deep exhale, she feels something --

She LOOKS UP.

Mad, still lying down, is awake and looking right at her. Augusta looks right back. No words pass between them.

They don't have to.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Mad takes inventory on the shelves, organizing what's left. Augusta comes in, still in her dress from the day before.

She looks like she's just woken up.

AUGUSTA
Day's half over.

MAD
Didn't wanna wake you.

Augusta moves and sits at the table.

MAD (CONT'D)
...She up too?

Augusta shakes her head. *No*.

MAD (CONT'D)
She needs the rest. Comin' back to life ain't easy.

Augusta looks out the window at the already waning sun.

AUGUSTA
Too late to start a hunt. Guess it's turnips.

MAD
We should talk 'bout that goat.

AUGUSTA
Her name's Hatty.

MAD
(on "name's")
I know her name.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA
Then don't call her "that goat."

MAD
Just 'cause you give it a name don't mean
we can't eat it.

AUGUSTA
We need the milk.

MAD
We need the meat.

AUGUSTA
We got the vegetables and hominy --

MAD
That won't keep us strong.

It's a stand off. And then --

AUGUSTA
We got anything to drink?

MAD
Yeah.

Beat.

MAD (CONT'D)
Goat's milk.

AUGUSTA
That's not what I meant.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

They both stare down A JAR OF MOONSHINE.

MAD
How you know 'bout this?

AUGUSTA
Whore showed me.

MAD
That's why you got sick.

AUGUSTA
I 'suppose.

MAD
And you wanna do it again?

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA
You never had this?

MAD
Unh-uh.

AUGUSTA
It seems odd considerin' it all came back
up but yes, I want some more.

Augusta gets two glasses. And then she pours.

MAD
Jesus ain't gonna be happy 'bout this.

AUGUSTA
Tthey a lot things right now Jesus ain't
happy 'bout.

Augusta raises her glass. She gestures for Mad to raise
hers too.

Mad raises it.

And then Augusta downs hers.

Mad does the same and then COUGHS and twists up her face.

Augusta grins.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Mad and Augusta are now DRUNK.

AUGUSTA
Gets easier more you drink.

MAD
Gets *real* easier.

AUGUSTA
I like the way I feel.

MAD
Bill was the only one your Daddy let
drink it. He come back at night stinkin'
and proud.

AUGUSTA
You was with him? Bill.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

MAD

I was.

AUGUSTA

You wanted to have his babies.

MAD

Oh, lord.

AUGUSTA

You miss him?

MAD

I do.

AUGUSTA

Was he --

Augusta stops herself.

MAD

Go on.

Beat.

MAD (CONT'D)

With this moonshine in me I'm fixed to answer any question you got.

AUGUSTA

You real sad?

MAD

We all real sad.

Augusta gets a dreamy girl look on her face like she's fixing to ask something blue.

AUGUSTA

What's it like?

MAD

Oh no.

AUGUSTA

You said you'd --

MAD

I never did understand why you didn't go with one of them boys that wanted to.

Augusta considers.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA

When mama died havin' Louise, it never occurred to me to be the woman somewhere else. Hadn't been for you I wouldn'ta known nothin' 'bout bein' a woman.

Mad looks right at Augusta.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

I watched you. I listened. You were kind.

MAD

I tried.

The two women lock eyes. And then, Mad gives in.

MAD (CONT'D)

Alright... what you wanna know?

AUGUSTA

How's it feel?

MAD

You'll know --

AUGUSTA

-- but what if I don't. What if all the men kill all the other men? What if it's the end of the world and we the only ones left?

MAD

It ain't the end of the world --

AUGUSTA

I think 'bout all the women sittin' in houses now. Were supposed to be taken, but ain't. Learned to shoot a gun fore they learned to bed. Learned to be men instead 'uh wives.

Mad hears her. She thinks about it. And then she motions for Augusta to pour her another shot.

She does.

They drink.

MAD

It's scary. It feels good, but it's scary. It hurts! But *good* hurts. Like ridin' a horse. Or shootin' a gun.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA
You didn't ever shoot no gun --

MAD
Well, what's it feel like?

Augusta thinks.

AUGUSTA
Feels powerful --

MAD
Yeah --

AUGUSTA
And scary.

MAD
Mmmhhhhmmm --

AUGUSTA
But the kind you want n' not the kind you
don't --

MAD
Yeah --

AUGUSTA
And it hurts --

MAD
That's right --

AUGUSTA
But I like it --

MAD
That's what I'm talkin' bout --

AUGUSTA
It's like shootin' a gun?

MAD
Yes ma'am.

A beat. She SMILES.

AUGUSTA
Least I done that.

Mad takes the bottle and pours them each some more.

And then --

(CONTINUED)

A NOISE, directly behind them. They turn to see...

LOUISE.

She's just standing there. Like a GHOST.

Augusta and Mad stare at her. She looks like she might fall over. They move quickly to her, help her to the table, sit her down.

They sit down, too. Staring at her.

Waiting.

LOUISE

I'm... hungry.

MAD

Did she say...

AUGUSTA

...hungry?

Mad and Augusta break into NOISES OF RAPTURE. Shouting and hollering and dancing around the room.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

She's hungry!

MAD

What did you say?!

LOUISE

I'm hungry.

MAD

Say it again!

Louise manages a small SMILE. And in the loudest voice she can muster:

LOUISE

I'm hungry!

INT. KEEPING ROOM - EVENING

Mad is at the stove, cooking FURIOUSLY.

MAD

I'm gonna cook you somethin' so good, Louise. Come-back-from-the-dead stew, that's what. Come-back-from-the-dead stew! Best stew I ever made.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAD (CONT'D)

Beef heart n' chicken breast. Prettiest vegetables you ever saw.

Augusta gets up and goes over to the cabinets. She pulls out the DRIED SAGE she brought back.

She takes it to Mad.

AUGUSTA

For a little flavor.

Mad takes it. They both look down into the pot.

Inside the pot, it's just RABBIT BONES and TURNIPS floating around in some water.

Augusta goes and sits with Louise. She stares at her. Louise has her head down on the table.

Mad starts to sing a song while she cooks. It's about -- of course -- Come-back-from-the-dead stew.

Augusta touches Louise's hair like something you're not supposed to touch.

Augusta puts her head down next to Louise's. They take each other in.

Augusta smiles a contented, drunken smile.

EXT. ROAD NEAR CALEB'S - EARLY MORNING

It's empty, as before.

The Black Rider and his horse come down the road. They reach Caleb's.

EXT. CALEB'S - SAME

A man, a woman, and a horse lie dead in the street.

Another body lies across the PORCH, and another is propped up against the building, a streak of blood smeared down above his head. Both are old men.

The Black Rider goes to the man's body closest to him, lying in the street, and rolls him over. It's Caleb.

Then he goes to the body of a WOMAN. It's Moll. Eyes wide, lips still smeared with blood. He closes her eyelids, makes the sign of the CROSS.

(CONTINUED)

Finally, he goes to the horse. He comes around the front and sees it's proud, dead face.

BLACK RIDER

...Fern?

He looks up, eyes searching.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Augusta splashes water on her face from a PORCELAIN BASIN, wipes it with a cloth, takes a deep breath. She's hung over.

She looks back at Mad and Louise, asleep in the bed together. Then she looks past them, to the window. The morning air creeping in.

A sudden uneasiness...

She grabs a BLANKET.

INT. FARMHOUSE / FRONT HALL - SAME

Augusta walks to the door, opens it.

She stands in the doorway wrapped in the BLANKET, bracing herself against the cold morning that comes rushing in.

She sees:

-- The GREEN HILLS

-- Clusters of TREES

-- Branches SWAYING, as if moved by some INVISIBLE HAND

As she stands there, watching the world...

The uneasiness overwhelms her.

She's been so focused on Louise that she hadn't really thought about what would happen next. But then she remembers and suddenly she feels a shift in the ground beneath her, in the air around her --

SOMETHING'S COMING.

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON: The red TONGUE of a tired dog, PANTING.

(CONTINUED)

It's Battle.

We widen out to reveal Henry and Moses as they come walking up behind him. Moses walks ahead of Henry, who lags behind holding a JUG of MOONSHINE, lip still CUT from where Moll bit him.

MOSES

Didn't realize you needed your mouth to walk proper.

HENRY

Whore damn near bit my lip off. I'm all dizzy.

MOSES

Just keep drinking that shine. It'll stop hurting soon.

HENRY

Ain't enough shine in this bottle fix what I got.

MOSES

No one suffers but you.

HENRY

If you were the one bit we'd still be sitting back at the whorehouse instead uh moving.

MOSES

I don't know that I'd call what you're doing moving.

HENRY

You sure we're going the right way?

MOSES

Road only goes one way.

HENRY

You know as well as I do
you can go any way you want
to on a --

MOSES

(on "want to")
We're on the right trail.

HENRY

Maybe we should stop a minute.

MOSES

Maybe you should quit acting like she bit off your foot.

Henry sits down right where he is.

(CONTINUED)

MOSES (CONT'D)

Fine.

Moses stops too. Shakes his head.

MOSES (CONT'D)

We can rest a while. We can rest.

He looks up at the sun.

HENRY

Wish we had some horses, Mose.

MOSES

Can't be too far off now.

He takes off his hat. Pushes back his hair. Feels the sun on his face. Puts it back on.

MOSES (CONT'D)

What's that story about the traveler lost his horse? And the horse knew how to get home but the man didn't?

HENRY

I don't know.

MOSES

The man would just get on the horse and go to town and come home at night. Never thought twice about the ride, just went. And one day he comes out to the post and his horse is just gone. And he's wandering around, looking everywhere, but he's not looking for his house, he's looking for the horse cause the horse's the only one who knows how to get home.

HENRY

I don't know this story.

MOSES

And his looking takes him so far that one day he ends up in a new town. And in that new town, he finds a new wife and a new horse. New house. And he's happier than before. Happier than he's ever been.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

MOSES (CONT'D)

And then, years later, long after he's forgotten about his wandering days he's out on his new horse, going home to his new wife and he sees a woman riding down the road on a familiar horse. And he swears he's seen that horse before and the horse swears he's seen that man before. But the man and the woman? They don't know each other. Can't place each other even though they were married for 20 years. And the man, he goes home to his new wife. And the woman, she goes home to her new husband. But the horse, the horse can't stop his wondering.

SUDDENLY Battle calls to them. The men turn and take notice of his stillness:

He's sitting right next to a CLUMP OF PRICKLY BUSHES.

MOSES (CONT'D)

What is it, boy?

Battle WHIMPERS.

MOSES (CONT'D)

You got something there?

Battle YELPS.

As Moses approaches Battle, he looks up and sees what the dog sees:

A SWATCH OF WORN FLOWERED FABRIC

Caught in the branches of the bush.

It's from Augusta's dress.

Moses grabs the fabric off of the bush, holds it to his nose and a takes a deep, long inhale.

HENRY

What's he got?

Moses puts it in his pocket. Looks up.

MOSES

Let's just say we're going the right way.

OMITTED

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The MOON is high. Everything is STILL.

The Farm is bathed in MOONLIGHT.

BLACK LEAVES rub together in the night breeze. SHADOWS throw long and tall across the house.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Augusta shakes Mad AWAKE.

MAD
What --

AUGUSTA
Shhhhhh.

MAD
Why wake me just to be quiet?

AUGUSTA
-- listen --

They listen together.

NOTHING.

MAD
Probably a ghost.

AUGUSTA
Come have a look with me?

INT. FARMHOUSE / STAIRCASE - MOMENTS LATER

Augusta, RIFLE in hand. Mad right behind her. Quietly, they make their way down the stairs.

They hear a STRANGE NOISE. Like a tearing or ripping.

It's coming from outside.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Augusta and Mad move in the darkness.

The sounds of a struggle --

RIP!

(CONTINUED)

A SNARL as flesh and muscle TEAR.

EXT. FIELD - SAME

Augusta and Mad approach the pen to see:

A CREATURE is tearing Hatty apart.

It's dark, but she's sure as sure it's the RACCOON.

Augusta AIMS, SHOOTS and HITS.

The creature WHIMPERS and COLLAPSES.

Augusta moves towards it. Mad stays back. When she gets close enough she goes to cry out, but stifles it well and BACKS AWAY in FEAR...

And then, we see it too:

The dying creature is not a raccoon. It's BATTLE.

AUGUSTA
Get back inside.

MAD
What was that?

A WHISTLE. It's familiar.

AUGUSTA
Inside. Now --

HENRY (O.C.)
Who's firing? Show yourself!

At the sound of a man's voice Mad and Augusta exchange a look and run inside.

MOSES (O.C.)
Battle! PHFT! PHFT! Battle!

INT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Mad BOLTS the BACK DOOR. And they run up the stairs.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The breathless women clamber into the bedroom.

They wake Louise.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA

Wake up.

Louise wakes, slowly.

LOUISE

What's goin' on?

MAD

We got men here --

AUGUSTA

Soldiers. Yankees.

MAD

How you know that?

MOSES (O.C.)

You shot the dog!

Augusta motions to Mad and Louise to be quiet. As the men continue singing and talking, she moves to the window and looks down, trying to see where exactly they are. But she can't find them.

HENRY (O.C.)

(singing)

He was just a dog.
Same as you and me.

Quickly, she RELOADS her rifle.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(singing)

You went and shot him down.
Couldn't let him be.

MOSES (O.S.)

Who else you got in there? Any men-
cowards? Or negros?

Augusta moves back to the others. Henry keeps singing under their dialogue:

HENRY

And now there's no more drink.
And there's no more dog.
I only have this gun.
And I'm through my song.

The women whisper, and FAST:

AUGUSTA

We got any other guns?

(CONTINUED)

MAD

Downstairs. In one of the drawers.

AUGUSTA

I'll get it and come back.

MAD

Let's get to the Keepin' Room.

AUGUSTA

We ain't leavin' this house.

MAD

Too many doors and windows and rooms --

AUGUSTA

We goin' to fight.

LOUISE

I don't wanna fight --

MAD

We can hide. They don't know we here.

AUGUSTA

They know someone shot their dog and they gonna come lookin'.

MAD

How you know what dog belong to what Yankees?

AUGUSTA

'Cause they followed me.

Mad doesn't know what to say when --

SUDDENLY --

BANG BANG BANG!

Someone POUNDS on the SIDE OF THE HOUSE.

Louise goes to SCREAM. Mad covers her mouth.

BANG BANG BANG!

Once she's sure Mad has Louise under control, Augusta moves to the door.

LOUISE

Don't go --

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA
You want them up here?

LOUISE
No.

AUGUSTA
Then I gotta go.

INT. FARMHOUSE / STAIRS - NIGHT

Augusta creeps down the stairs. The BANGING continues.

HENRY (O.C.)
Shine's all gone. I could use a drink!

MOSES
We been knocking, but nobody come down to
invite us in.

And just as she reaches the bottom...

It STOPS.

She waits a few moments...

AND THEN --

A bullet RIPS through a wall across the house. The sound
of Henry LAUGHING WILDLY.

Augusta stays low, until --

ALL OF A SUDDEN --

BULLET after BULLET after BULLET comes ripping through
the walls. She can't believe it's only two men, how they
keep coming.

She has to get on the ground to keep safe.

The BULLETS RIP through the walls of the house, one after
the other.

And then as suddenly as it started...

It's OVER.

She waits.

And then --

CRASH!

(CONTINUED)

The sound of BREAKING GLASS from the FRONT RIGHT window.
She darts to --

INT. FARMHOUSE / FRONT RIGHT ROOM - SAME

Henry has stuffed a RAG ON FIRE into the remains of the JUG OF MOONSHINE and thrown it through the window.

A FIRE now blazes on the floor just inside the window.

Augusta puts down her rifle and looks around for something to put out the fire. There's nothing. Thinking fast, she pulls off her nightgown and puts out the fire with it.

Once it's out she picks up her gun.

She moves through the house NAKED, rifle at the ready.

Another window BREAKS on the other side of the house.

She runs to --

INT. FARMHOUSE / FRONT LEFT ROOM - SAME

In the WINDOW:

A HAND creeps through the broken glass and goes to open the window from the inside.

Augusta takes aims at the hand. She steadies herself as best she can and when she's ready, she takes a step towards the window, takes a long deep breath...

And SHOOTS.

The hand RECOILS as the bullet passes through the tender area between thumb and forefinger.

She can hear Henry SCREAMING in the night.

And she makes a break for it.

INT. FARMHOUSE / FRONT ROOM - SAME

Augusta finds the SMALL BOX by the door on the one TABLE that's left. It's filled with mostly trinkets and odds and ends, things that may have belonged to her mother, a long time ago...

(CONTINUED)

But the gun isn't there.

Quickly, quietly she moves to a LARGER BOX by the door.

And then she finds it: a small SINGLE-SHOT REVOLVER.

With a SINGLE BALL and BLACK POWDER.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Henry holds his arm to his chest. He is moving quickly, but comes to rest on an exterior wall of the house.

Moses is right behind him.

HENRY
(under his breath)
Shit shit shit!

Beat.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Shit, Mose --

He shows his hand. All bloody and mangled. Moses winces at the sight of it.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Women taking all kinds of parts of me
today.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Augusta BURSTS into the room.

This conversation happens VERY QUICKLY:

LOUISE
What's happenin'?

AUGUSTA
(to Mad)
This your gun.

Mad takes it in her hands. Frightened.

LOUISE
Why you naked?

AUGUSTA
Fire. Had to put it out.

(CONTINUED)

LOUISE

What?

Augusta opens the wardrobe and pulls on a pair of bloomers and a blouse as she talks. She also takes a POUCH of GUN POWDER that was tied to her dress and ties it to the blouse she now wears.

AUGUSTA

I gotta reload. Do as I do.

Augusta hands her the ball and the powder.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Powder goes in.

They both do it. Mad watches her so closely --

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Then the ball.

Augusta does it. Mad copies her motion.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Push down like this.

Augusta drops the ball in. So does Mad.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

Pull this back --

Augusta's just showing her how, but Mad actually does it.

Mad pulls her hand away as if the words have reminded her that she wasn't about to fire.

She looks back to Augusta.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

You pull this and hold real steady.

Mad nods.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Moses crouches next to Henry, his gun down. He's taken the tail of his shirt from his pants and ripped part of it off at the bottom to wrap around Henry's HAND.

MOSES

(calling out)

Girl! We will give you to the count of ten to come on out or we're coming in.

(CONTINUED)

They wait for a response.

NOTHING.

Moses motions for Henry to go around front.

Henry nods, he goes.

And with that Moses heads around back --

MOSES (CONT'D)

One.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

MOSES (O.C.)

Two.

The women listen and then --

AUGUSTA

I'm gonna try n' draw 'em away from the house --

MOSES (O.C.)

Three.

Augusta looks at her sister one last time and then she goes to the door.

AUGUSTA

You bar this door behind me.

MOSES (O.C.)

Four.

Mad looks at the gun and then back up at Augusta.

AUGUSTA

If a man comes through this door -- no matter what -- you shoot.

She goes. Mad BARS the door behind her. She turns and looks at Louise.

Louise backs up into the far CORNER. Terrified.

EXT. FARMHOUSE / BACK - SAME

Moses moves across the back of the house. He's low, creeping along below the windows.

(CONTINUED)

MOSES

Five.

He stops and settles, crouching by the BACK DOOR.

EXT. FARMHOUSE / FRONT - SAME

Henry moves to the FRONT DOOR. His RIFLE across his BACK.
His PISTOL in his HAND.

MOSES (O.C.)

Six.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Louise is huddled in the corner.

Mad stands by the door, pistol drawn.

MOSES (O.C.)

Seven.

EXT. FARMHOUSE / BACK - SAME

Moses still crouches.

MOSES

Eight.

And then he HEARS something.

He moves away from the door, along the back of the house.

He looks around the corner to the left towards the well
and the tree beyond, but he doesn't see anything.

MOSES (CONT'D)

(throwing his voice in the
other direction)

...Nine...

He waits.

He sees SOMETHING MOVE just behind the WELL, away from
the house.

And then it disappears behind a TREE.

He moves towards it...

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Hiding behind the tree is...

AUGUSTA. Rifle up.

She waits. Breaths heavy.

AUGUSTA
(to herself)
Where's ten?

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Louise is still huddled in the corner, Mad remains by the door. They hear GLASS BREAKING below them. FOOTSTEPS. Louise tries to keep it in, but a small whimper gets out.

MAD
(whispered)
Louise. Don't make no sound. Nothin'. You hear?

Louise nods.

INT. FARMHOUSE / FRONT ROOM - SAME

Henry moves through the big front room of the house, surprised by how few possessions there are.

How empty it is.

He makes his way to the --

INT. FARMHOUSE / STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

And he begins to climb. Pistol still drawn.

He takes the first step carefully, quietly, slowly, careful not to give himself away.

He's a GHOST.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Augusta moves from behind the tree and darts over to a WAGON that sits near the BARN, squatting behind it. She feels that Moses is near.

And then we see him, creeping towards where she hides.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA
 (calling out)
 You followed me.

Taken aback, he didn't know she knew he was there.

MOSES
 I did.

He moves a little closer. Gun at the ready.

AUGUSTA
 Why didn't you kill me with Caleb and
 that woman? Why not kill me now?

MOSES
 Want to keep you a while.

INT. FARMHOUSE / STAIRS - SAME

Henry's FOOT comes down on the top step, and --

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

CRREEEEAK.

Louise presses deeper into the corner. Mad steels
 herself, shakily holds the gun --

Louise WHIMPERS again.

Mad turns to her and with her eyes begs her to hush --

INT. FARMHOUSE / HALLWAY - SAME

Henry STOPS. Listens. He's heard something.

Slowly, he moves towards the bedroom door, towards the
 source of the sound.

His hand REACHES OUT to the door --

It's BOLTED --

He STEPS BACK...

WAITS, and...

SLAM!

He BUSTS it OPEN --

(CONTINUED)

The SLAT OF WOOD holding the door BREAKS IN HALF --

And there's Mad, standing between him and Louise, PISTOL in hand.

And she PULLS THE TRIGGER --

CLICK. CLICK.

NOTHING.

For a moment, Henry is taken aback. He didn't expect to find these women here. With a gun, no less.

Mad pulls the trigger again --

Louise begins to CRY in the corner --

AND THEN --

Henry HOLSTERS his PISTOL, walks over to Mad, who keeps pulling the trigger...

...and he takes the gun out of her hands.

He opens the chamber, sticks his finger in.

HENRY

Damp powder. Must be as old as the gun.

And then SUDDENLY --

VIOLENTLY --

He takes the BUTT of the gun and strikes Mad clear across the face, knocking her out.

Henry turns his attention to Louise, still cowering in the corner. She's SOBBING quietly, now.

They stand there.

Motionless.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Moses stands, his eyes on the Wagon.

MOSES

Something about you makes me wanna sit down.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA

Then why you come here like you want a war?

MOSES

Don't know how to stop.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

The BUTT of Henry's RIFLE as it comes down across the door where the wooden slat had been. He's making sure that no one else can get in...

...or out.

He turns and looks directly at Louise.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Cautiously, Moses moves nearer to the Wagon. Gun ready.

MOSES

Come on out now, let me see you.

He's close now. Augusta can feel it.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Why don't we put down these guns?

Beat.

MOSES (CONT'D)

We can be closer without them.

He lowers his gun...

AND SUDDENLY --

Augusta COMES OUT from behind the Wagon and FIRES.

Moses is HIT IN THE STOMACH. Falling, he FIRES BACK, hitting her in the SHOULDER.

Both of them fall to the ground.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Henry and Louise hear the ECHO OF THE TWO SHOTS.

And after that, it's just quiet.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Maybe it's just you and me, now.

Louise shoves herself even further into the corner.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(touches his pistol)

If you don't stop moving, I might have to shoot you.

She stops.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I don't want to shoot you.

SUDDENLY --

Louise STANDS --

Henry is on the other side of the bed, not sure which way she'll go --

Louise prepares to make her move --

Henry is enjoying this --

And then she DARTS over the top of the bed towards the door, but Henry lunges toward her, pulling her down onto the bed.

He FORCES her nightgown up with his good hand. Some of the blood from his bandaged hand gets on her skin.

Louise CRIES out. Henry pulls the upper part of her nightgown up and stuffs it in her mouth. She GAGS.

She tries to rise up, but she is so weak, and he is a man. He pushes her back down and holds her there.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Don't make me hurt you.

And then, there is one small moment, just one, where it doesn't feel wrong to Louise, when she goes to a place in her mind where she realizes that this -- *this* -- is what it feels like to have a man inside you.

She submits.

This is not something to look at, not ever.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Moses stands, slowly.

He looks down at his GUT. BLOODY as hell.

He hobbles over to where Augusta lies. Stands above her.
This isn't what he wanted.

He looks down at her --

She's not moving --

AND THEN --

WHACK!

She slams him in the head with the butt of her RIFLE,
knocking him down.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Henry FINISHES and falls down on top of Louise. And for a
moment it's quiet and still.

He pushes himself off of her, back to his feet.

Louise doesn't move. It's hard to tell if she's even
alive. He looks at her lying there.

In this moment, she looks like the young girl that she
is. And just as he's realizing what he's done he hears
the familiar click of his own rifle's HAMMERS and --

BANG!

Henry is shot in the back, straight through the middle of
his chest.

He falls forward onto the bed, onto Louise, DEAD.

And we TURN TO SEE:

Mad, standing by the door, Henry's RIFLE poised and
smoking.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Augusta has slung her rifle slung across her back and is
slinging Moses' around too when she hears --

THE ECHO OF THE SHOT.

(CONTINUED)

She grabs his pistol and fueled by FEAR, makes for the house as fast as she can.

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

Louise struggles to pull herself out from underneath Henry, but he's so big and dead and she's so tired and weak and she's pushing and shoving and she starts to POUND on him with her fists and now it's not about trying to get out it's about trying to hurt him hurt him for hurting her for hurting all of them and she's hitting him so hard now and she's GRUNTING and CRYING and --

Mad moves to her and tries to wrestle her down.

MAD

Enough. Enough. Enough.

Louise won't stop but Mad can tell she's weakening.

MAD (CONT'D)

(almost a whisper)

Enough.

Finally, Louise submits. Mad helps her out from under Henry and holds her close.

And with that --

Augusta comes clambering into the room, Moses' pistol at the ready, all blood and dirt, the two rifles slung across her back.

She stops when she sees the soldier dead and Mad holding Louise.

She fears she knows what has happened.

There is nothing to say.

Augusta goes to the two women and wraps her arms around them. Mad sees Augusta's wound but says nothing.

The women stay this way for a moment.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - AN HOUR OR TWO BEFORE DAWN

Mad, Augusta and Louise come quickly through the door.

Augusta has both Moses' rifle and her own slung across her back. She has his pistol, too.

(CONTINUED)

Mad has Henry's rifle.

Louise's nightgown is covered in blood. So is Louise.

Augusta sits Louise down.

Mad LOCKS the BOLT on the door.

Augusta grabs another chair, pulls it over and sits with Louise. She touches her sister's face. Trying to figure out what she can possibly do to help her.

Mad goes to the cabinet and pulls out the jug of moonshine.

Mad pours the moonshine on Augusta's wound.

AUGUSTA

AAAGGGHHH --

Augusta picks up the moonshine. Drinks.

Mad wraps the cloth around the burned wound.

Augusta looks at her sister. She pushes the moonshine over to her. Nods at her to take a drink.

Louise hesitates...

And then, she drinks.

She quickly pulls her mouth away. Coughs. Sputters.

Mad ties off the bandage and finally, she sits down.

And they just sit there.

MAD

At my second farm, there was this one shed we wasn't allowed at. All the other buildings had their jobs. One for feed. One for tools. But there was this one shed that we was told never to go in. Not to play near it. Not to get curious. We made up all sorts of stories. Gold. Ghosts. God. Then, one day when I was 'bout ten the man told me to go to the shed.

She remembers that moment of happiness.

MAD (CONT'D)

I was goin' to the shed. I would get to know.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAD (CONT'D)

I walked to the shed, my heart comin' out my dress. I was gonna get to know. I was gonna get to know. I was gonna be the one tell all the others.

Beat.

MAD (CONT'D)

I open the door. Only thing in there was a low cot and no windows. I stood in there a minute so unsure. So sad that that was all. Wonderin' why we wasn't supposed to know for so long. And then the man come in.

Beat.

MAD (CONT'D)

And he had me. He was so big and I was so small. So small that I didn't even know what was happenin'. That was the first time. And there were many more. Some times they cut the baby out. Other times, they kept 'em. I don't know where they are now.

Beat.

MAD (CONT'D)

There many kinds of monsters in this world, you never know which one goin' to be yours. Don't know what happened to mine. Probably died old and happy. But yours --

Louise looks up at Mad.

LOUISE

You killed him --

MAD

That's right.

Beat.

MAD (CONT'D)

Your monster's dead.

Louise looks at Mad in a way she never has.

And Mad looks right back.

And then they hear a NOISE behind the Keeping Room.

(CONTINUED)

Heavy FEET on the earth.

Augusta motions for Mad to grab Henry's rifle. Augusta grabs hers.

She hands Louise Moses' pistol.

Augusta points at the DOOR. Points at HERSELF and points LEFT. Points at MAD and points RIGHT. Points at LOUISE and then gestures for her to STAY PUT.

Everyone understands.

Mad opens the door, carefully and quietly.

Augusta goes around to the left and Mad goes around to the right. Louise closes the door behind them.

She picks up the pistol. Regards it. Struggles for a moment, but then she COCKS it.

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mad stalks around one side.

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - SAME

Augusta stalks around the other.

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - SAME

Mad comes around the back and sees the BACK of a UNION SOLDIER standing there.

He hears her...

Mad thrusts the RIFLE out in front of her, steadying herself...

THE SOLDIER TURNS...

But it's not Moses...

...it's the Black Rider.

THIS IS BILL.

What happens next is VERY FAST:

Recognition moves over both of their faces --

(CONTINUED)

Mad lowers her gun, in SHOCK --

Bill can't believe he's made it back, can't believe she's really standing there --

BANG!

Bill FALLS FORWARD.

THUD.

SILENCE.

Augusta stands behind Bill, drops her RIFLE to her side.

She SMILES. It's over.

Mad is in complete shock. She can't move.

UNTIL --

She emits a low MOAN, a moan of infinite SORROW and SADNESS and LOSS.

She runs to Bill, kneels down next to him.

His eyes search her face, moving wildly, as if the very act will keep him alive.

MAD

Shhhh. Shhhhhh. Shhhhh, baby.

AUGUSTA

What you doin'?

Augusta moves to them.

And then, like a PUNCH TO THE GUT, Augusta KNOWS. She drops the gun. Falls down to her knees.

MAD

You come back.

BILL

Just wanted to hear that old voice again.

He reaches his hand up to touch her face, but he can't quite make it. Mad grabs his hand and helps him the rest of the way.

She holds his hand with her hand to her face.

BILL (CONT'D)

It's over. It's all over.

(CONTINUED)

MAD

What you mean?

BILL

Take shelter. They comin'.

His eyes stop their wandering.

Mad leans in and kisses his lips. HARD.

She puts her face to his face.

His breathing is so thin...

And then he's GONE.

We stay here for a bit, in SILENCE.

And then Mad takes the pistol from Bill's hand, gets up, and walks back into the Keeping Room.

Augusta doesn't move. And then, she knows she must.

If that wasn't Moses...

INT. KEEPING ROOM - SAME

Louise crouches in the corner. Pistol at the ready.

Mad walks in and Louise lowers her gun.

Mad sits at the table. Silent.

LOUISE

Is it done?

Mad remains silent.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

...Mad?

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Augusta moves over to the Wagon, to where Moses...

His BLOOD soaks the earth...

His HAT lies on the ground...

BUT HE IS NOT THERE.

She looks every which way. He's nowhere.

MAD (CONT'D)

Might be another man out there. Ain't no time to think on love.

AUGUSTA

There is another man out there.

MAD

We ain't goin' to wait for him.

Beat.

MAD (CONT'D)

We goin' out there to hunt him. And we ain't come back 'til he ours.

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - MORNING

We're WIDE on the farm and the surrounding buildings.

And save for the symphony of southern bugs...

It's DEAD QUIET. And then we see --

Our three women EMERGE from the keeping room and move through the dawn.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

They are spread across the field, moving towards us. Separately, but also as one.

Their RIFLES lead the way.

Louise carries Henry's rifle. Mad carries Bill's.

They move towards the wagon where Moses was, hoping to discover a trail to where he's gone.

They STOP.

Augusta finds SOME BLOOD and then a few steps away a bit MORE. She motions to start moving again.

In SILENCE, the women follow.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

Augusta tracks the blood to the back of the house. The BACK DOOR is open. A BLOODY HAND PRINT smeared across the outside wall of the house.

(CONTINUED)

She looks back to the others.

With their eyes, they agree to keep going.

INT. FARMHOUSE - SAME

The BLOOD leads from the door to the stairs. Augusta follows the trail, the women behind her.

They mount the stairs.

INT. FARMHOUSE / HALLWAY - SAME

BLOOD is smeared across the DOOR FRAME of the bedroom.

The door is slightly ajar.

Augusta takes a BREATH --

Pushes the door open with the NOSE of her RIFLE...

INT. FARMHOUSE / BEDROOM - SAME

But Moses is NOT THERE.

And then she sees --

Henry's BODY lying on the bed.

Augusta searches the room for an answer, for something, anything to tell her what to do, and then she notices that Henry's PISTOL has been removed from his HOLSTER. And there's fresh BLOOD on it.

Quickly, Augusta moves out of the room --

INT. FARMHOUSE / HALLWAY - SAME

-- following the trail of BLOOD --

Mad and Louise stand STOCK STILL --

And Augusta looks back down at the blood in front of the bedroom door and realizes --

The spots were him COMING...

AND GOING.

Louise and Mad look down and see it too.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Augusta comes out the door, then Louise, then Mad.

The women look down at the ground. BLOOD. But --

There is ANOTHER trail, headed in ANOTHER direction...

AWAY from the house.

Augusta knows he's not too far now.

The others keep pace. They slowly approach...

THE FENCE.

There is BLOOD painted across one of its posts --

She looks DOWN.

And on the WOODEN WALKWAY...

MORE BLOOD leads AWAY, out and around, back to the place they just came from, back to the --

EXT. KEEPING ROOM - SAME

The door is slightly ajar. A LIGHT pours out from within.

Augusta stops. Her breaths are HEAVY.

The others stop too.

She takes a step CLOSER...

And ANOTHER.

And --

MOSES (O.C.)

This is fine moonshine.

Augusta stops. Catches herself.

Holds it back as best she can.

AUGUSTA

Our daddy made it.

MOSES (O.C.)

Your daddy made fine moonshine.

She moves closer...

(CONTINUED)

MOSES (O.C.) (CONT'D)
I've been waiting for you.

AUGUSTA
I was looking for you.

And closer still. She can see a SLIVER of him now,
sitting there, sitting at her table.

MOSES (O.C.)
You found me.

AUGUSTA
I did.

MOSES (O.C.)
Saw Henry's dead.

AUGUSTA
Your man?

MOSES
He was.

And she reaches the door.

She pushes it open all the way with the back of her arm,
gun still up, still ready.

And then, she sees all of him...

INT. KEEPING ROOM - SAME

Moses sits there, in the chair farthest from the door,
his gut and chest now COVERED in BLOOD. His wound is as
bad as she thought, spilling out red all over him.

The fire is dying behind him.

The JUG OF MOONSHINE sits on the table next to him. His
hand around her small glass.

His other hand is propped up on the table...

Henry's PISTOL pointed right at her.

MOSES
I like this room.

AUGUSTA
I like it too.

She moves a little closer.

(CONTINUED)

He lets her.

Mad and Louise move to the doorway, standing just barely on the edge of the room. They don't come in.

AUGUSTA (CONT'D)

What's your name?

MOSES

Moses.

AUGUSTA

Like the baby.

MOSES

Just like.

AUGUSTA

...Why're you doin' this, Moses?

MOSES

Me an' him are bummers. Sent on ahead to forage the outlying land, look for food, deserters, survivors. Whole army's just behind us. Already took Georgia. Uncle Billy's heading this way. Burning down every thing in his path. Rest assured, it'll be cruel.

Mad and Louise exchange a look.

MOSES (CONT'D)

And the crueler it is the sooner it'll be over.

AUGUSTA

We can hold 'em.

He smiles.

MOSES

Girl, I believe you can.

He takes a drink from his glass.

MOSES (CONT'D)

You know how many battles I fought in?

AUGUSTA

Don't seem like many, easy as you went down.

(CONTINUED)

MOSES

No. It don't. But it was. And yet, here I sit --

AUGUSTA

-- here you sit --

MOSES

-- *shit*.

Beat.

AUGUSTA

This is whatcha get for bein' bad.

MOSES

North ain't bad.

AUGUSTA

Didn't say it was. Said you was.

MOSES

And you, you're good.

AUGUSTA

Don't know no more.

MOSES

Used to though.

She sits in the chair closest to the door, her gun still trained on him. And his still trained on her.

AUGUSTA

Back when everyone was in the right place it was easy to feel like I was good. Like I was where I belonged. Like everyone was. And then all things got moved and once all things got moved it was hard to know.

Moses considers.

MOSES

Most likely things won't go back to where they were. Rarely do.

Beat.

MOSES (CONT'D)

I'd like to know your name.

AUGUSTA

Augusta.

(CONTINUED)

MOSES

Augusta.

Somehow that word, her name, the way she says it...

He opens his hand and lets the gun ROLL onto the table.

It surprises her. She looks at the gun, just lying there, and then she looks back at him.

She lowers her gun. Just a little.

Louise goes to say something, she's so AFRAID --

But Mad stops her.

He coughs, but it sounds like CHOKING. Some BLOOD comes up. He puts his hand to his LIP, looks at the blood on his fingers, and then back at Augusta.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Things could be different.

Beat.

AUGUSTA

But they ain't.

MOSES

I know it's over. To tell the truth, I'm heartened.

(beat)

Don't know that I'd even know how to get home from here.

He raises the glass to her. It hurts. He cringes --

But he keeps it high. Just for her.

MOSES (CONT'D)

I'd very much appreciate it if you'd show me the way.

Augusta steals herself. She knows what she has to do.

AUGUSTA

(*You ready to go now?*)

You bout finished your drink?

He lowers the glass to his lips --

MOSES

(*I am.*)

Just abou --

(CONTINUED)

She SHOTS him.

Louise steels herself against Mad.

Augusta lowers her gun, looks down...

And then she looks up at him, one last time.

EXT. FIELD - LATE MORNING

Henry's body LANDS in a hole in the ground.

From BELOW, we see Mad and Augusta standing, looking in. Augusta holds a SHOVEL at her side.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

Augusta stands by Moses' body at the edge of the freshly dug HOLE.

She squats down to pat his pockets and finds a small purse with some coins, and then she finds a THE SCRAP OF FABRIC FRO HER DRESS. She's taken a back. It's wrapped around A TINTYPE of MOSES posing with AN OLDER COUPLE. Perhaps it's his parents. She looks at their faces, holds the picture close to her eyes. She puts it back in his pocket. She finds a few bullets, too. Takes them.

She looks at his face.

And then, with all her might, she rolls him into the same hole as Henry, right on top of him.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

Mad sits next to Bill, who now lies on the edge of hole. Mad doesn't turn, she just feels Augusta behind her.

MAD

How strange he show up here lookin' like a Yankee.

Augusta's about to say something when --

MAD (CONT'D)

I reckon he joined up.

AUGUSTA

With them --

MAD

Maybe he was free.

Augusta understands.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTA

And he came back.

MAD

I didn't know people looked the same
whether they was dead or alive.

AUGUSTA

What do you mean?

MAD

He gone. But he don't look so bad. Like
he's sleepin' maybe.

AUGUSTA

He look dead.

MAD

But he look goooooood.

Mad runs her hand down his face. Augusta smiles.

Mad goes to shove him in.

AUGUSTA

You sure you don't wanna dig another
hole?

MAD

Ain't time. Ain't strength.

AUGUSTA

Don't think he should go in the same
place as them.

MAD

Don't worry. They ain't goin' to the same
place.

And with that, Mad goes to push Bill into the hole.
Augusta joins her and together they send him home.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Louise sleeps in the corner. Augusta sits by her side.
Slowly, Louise wakes up.

They take each other in and then --

MAD (O.C.)

Augusta! Augusta come out here!

EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Mad stands on a hill overlooking the land.

Augusta comes running and once she sees why Mad's calling, she slows down.

The two women stand, looking out. We stay on their bewildered FACES, a mix of wonder and terror.

MAD

Looks like the sky's on fire.

AUGUSTA

Looks like the whole world's on fire.

MAD

They comin'.

INT. KEEPING ROOM - LATER

The faint SOUNDS OF WAR in the distance.

Mad and Louise sit at the table. Augusta paces back and forth.

AUGUSTA

This is our home.

Louise takes Mad's hand. Holds it tight.

LOUISE

This our home.

Mad holds tight back. She knows what Louise is trying to say even if Louise doesn't know quite how to say it.

BOOM! A cannon erupts in the distance.

AUGUSTA

And we gonna have to defend it.

LOUISE

...What if we didn't stay?

Augusta stops, turns.

AUGUSTA

What?

LOUISE

What if we went?

(CONTINUED)

MAD
They comin' fast --

LOUISE
So?

MAD
The Union army's walkin' right for us we
can't just walk right back.

LOUISE
A few guns ain't gonna keep 'em out.

AUGUSTA
We can hold 'em. We can keep it safe.

Louise stands, challenging her sister.

LOUISE
Keeping Room's just walls Augusta. Ain't
nothin' safe.

Mad stands too.

MAD
Three women comin' 'gainst the Union army
don't mean nothin'.

Augusta rests her hands on the table, leaning forward.

AUGUSTA
(realizing)
What if it was men instead uh women?

Augusta looks up at Louise and then at Mad.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

The women stand over the fresh graves. Augusta picks up
the SHOVEL, winces at the pain in her shoulder.

Mad takes the shovel from her and plunges the BLADE into
the DIRT.

CUT TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE / SECOND BEDROOM - DUSK

A series of IMAGES:

-- CLOTHING lands in a PILE on the floor.

(CONTINUED)

-- Augusta pulls on a pair of dirty ARMY TROUSERS.

-- Mad buttons up an MAN'S SHIRT.

-- Louse tucks her hair into a UNION CAP.

Augusta buttons up the last buttons of the jacket and feels something against her breast. Her hand goes to it... and she remembers the PHOTOGRAPH.

She pulls it out. We don't see it, but she looks at it once more, and then tucks it safely back into his pocket.

And then the FULL PICTURE:

Augusta, Louise and Mad stand in front of the tall mirror in full UNION UNIFORM. They look at themselves, all dressed up as men. As soldiers. The uniforms are too big, of course, but the women wear them well.

Throughout this scene, the SOUNDS OF WAR grow louder.

The sound of GUNS and CANNONS ever closer.

They look at themselves in the mirror.

They aren't women anymore.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Augusta stands JUST OUTSIDE the open doorway.

She holds one of the OIL LAMPS, considering for a moment...

AND THEN --

She THROWS it right through the door.

It BREAKS, and the floor immediately catches FIRE.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The land GRUMBLES in the distance, but here, for the moment, all is still.

Mad and Louise stand a short distance from the house and watch as THE FIRE STARTS AND CATCHES in one of the downstairs windows.

Augusta emerges from the house and joins them.

(CONTINUED)

The three of them watch the fire SPREAD, consuming the only home they've ever known.

Louise looks at Augusta, their eyes lock for a moment. Then Augusta looks at Mad, and their eyes lock too.

And then, they turn and walk. Together. Towards the ROAD.

As they walk, the FIRE continues to GROW behind them, consuming the ground floor of the house.

Louise turns her head to look once more --

AUGUSTA

Don't look back.

Louise repositions her eyes on the road ahead.

They are feeling the exact same feeling in the exact same way: they are at once afraid and unafraid.

We go out WIDE as GROUPS of MEN appear from around the back of the Farmhouse. They are UNION SOLDIERS. Some move towards the KEEPING ROOM. Others towards the BARN.

But the majority of them fill in around the women, SWALLOWING them into their fold. And the women walk on, among them, unrecognized for what they are.

The FIRE GROWS behind them. Turning their world to ASH and RUBBLE.

The sounds of WAR consume them. Consume us all.

And slowly, slowly, EVER SO SLOWLY, the camera RISES...

UP, UP, UP...

Into the air, above the women, above the road, above the Farmhouse, the Keeping Room, the Barn and the land.

And settles into the sky.

Their FIRE becomes one of many FIRES.

And there is CRACKLING.

HOLLERING.

BARKING.

GUNSHOTS.

CANONS.

(CONTINUED)

FIRE.

MEN ARE EVERYWHERE.

They creep up over the land like zombies.

THE END.